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Catch a Dream in 2014

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Catch-a-Dream hunter Tyler Gunlogson

There was only one thing was bigger than 15 year old Tyler Gunlogson's size 15 hunting boots on the morning of the 28th of September; his smile. Why was he all grins? Well, that's just what happens when you fulfill a lifelong dream within a 24 hour span of time. This is his story.

Mornings start early in the hunting camp but that didn't seem to bother Tyler one bit. He was getting ready to go on a "**Catch-A-Dream**" hunt for a bull elk and had 89,000 acres of prime *Cervus canadensis* (elk) habitat at his disposal on the Valles Caldera. "**Catch-A-Dream**" is a national, charitable, foundation that provides once-in-a-lifetime dream hunting and fishing trips to children across the United States and Canada, age 18 and younger, who suffer from life-threatening illnesses.

Tyler's enthusiasm was evident but his dad Kevin Gunlogson was not nearly as "bright eyed and bushy tailed" as his son (something to do with getting only a couple hours of sleep). However, once the coffee kicked in and the bacon and eggs were served, father, son and the rest of the crew's excitement could be sensed around the breakfast table.

A day prior to this morning the Gunlogson's were amidst the corn field country of Castana, Iowa; the neck of the woods that they call home. Kevin works as a corn farmer, and Tyler is your typical 15 year old young man. Well, almost typical.

To look at Tyler you would think "Oh, he's just another healthy corn fed young man from the Midwest". Six feet tall and 200 lbs of adolescence resting atop two size 15 "hooves" he is the picture of health but in fact is he's only recently been healthy. You see, two years ago Tyler was diagnosed with **Hodgkin's Lymphoma**, formerly known as Hodgkin's disease (a cancer of the lymphatic system that can compromise a person's ability to fight infection).

Talk about a tough kid, after undergoing chemotherapy, and countless hours in hospitals, Tyler's cancer has been in remission for a year now and he is doing well. Well enough to go elk hunting and this is where the **Catch-A-Dream** comes in.

An application was sent to the Foundation by Tyler's family listing three of his most desired hunting or fishing adventures. After reviewing his application, the Foundation sent him notice that he had been accepted and needed to get ready for an elk hunt on the Valles Caldera National Preserve. His dream request for a bull elk hunt was now coming true.

Morning light brought a stiff breeze from the west and low clouds began to cloak the rim of the Caldera, spitting an occasional rain drop or two. Then the air cooled making it perfect weather for an elk hunt. Tyler and his dad were packed into the "hunt truck" along with his guide Dennis Trujillo (former executive director of the Trust), the Preserve's hunt coordinator Mick Trujillo and **Catch-A-Dream's** New Mexico hunt coordinator Walt Taylor. All went to the hunt area.

As they rolled up the Preserve road in the early twilight of dawn the bulls were already singing their songs. Piercing screams starting low and rising to a high crescendo and then ending in low chuckles echoed all around. It was as if the bulls thought the sheer volume of their bellows and screams would defend their cows from the constant nagging of satellite bulls. Perhaps it worked for deterring other bulls but it did little to defend the bulls from Tyler and his 30-06 "Savage" rifle. In fact, their singing would eventually draw a bull right into Tyler's lap.

Light filtered slowly into the Preserve. Its misty glow silhouetted dozens of elk grazing the tall frost cured grasses of Valle Grande. The elk were on the move early and heading north toward the fire blackened timber that clings to the slopes of Cerro del Medio torched by the Las Conchas fire of 2011.

After spotting a nice bull in this group, Tyler and crew made their way to an interception point along the herd's line of travel. But as often happens while hunting, the elk disappeared before a shot could be fired and escaped safely up the mountain. Now on to plan B; taking Tyler up the Rincon valley.

Bouncing their way up the VC-04 road into the ponderosa forest of the Rincon Valley the bulls were bugling loud enough to hear from inside the "hunt truck". So guide and party decided it would be a great location to try some bugling to see if they could entice a bull in to shooting range for Tyler.

Tyler and Dennis left the truck and made their way up and over a timbered ridge to set up along an old logging road. Meanwhile, Mick took a position 50 yards behind them and began to do his best impersonation of a rut crazed bull. As Mick began to bugle and thrash trees while breaking sticks (imitating two fighting bulls) a response was promptly heard from a bull. There was a bugle and then the sound of crashing timber. The bull was on his way!

Covered in mud from head to hoof (from recent wallowing) the 4X5's ebony colored antlers and massive body almost floated down the mountain making a bee line for the two rivals that he knew were causing a ruckus in his domain. Little did he know that the rivals were not rut crazed bull elk. They were Tyler and Dennis.

At 150 yards the bull burst into an opening and presented Tyler with a good shot angle. Tyler steadied his aim and fired. The bull was down.

"It's a good thing he took the shot when he did," said Dennis, "That bull was on a collision course with us because Mick was calling from right behind us and we were in the middle of the two!" All that Tyler could say was, "He's big. He's big!"



Tyler (center) with the some of the crew that made his dream come true.

And big he was. The bull's antlers were black from rubbing on the fire charred timber of the mountain and in sharp contrast to the ivory polished tine tips. A broken tine was evidence of his testosterone driven tendencies. Sure this bull was big, big like Tyler's size 15 hunting boots. But as Tyler and his dad sat admiring this beautiful animal its trophy sized antlers seemed to pale in comparison to the smile that Tyler wore; a smile speaking volumes about a dream come true!

The Catch-A-Dream Foundation can be found at;

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